

The Impact of the Sudanese Civil War on African Stability

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ABSTRACT

The protracted civil war in Sudan has triggered intertwined political, security, and humanitarian crises that erode state integrity and pose significant risks to regional stability in Africa. This article examines the repercussions of the Sudanese civil war on African stability across three interlinked dimensions: regional security, socio-economic robustness, and the performance of regional and international mechanisms for conflict management. Employing a qualitative descriptive method that draws on literature reviews, policy papers, and reports issued by regional and international organizations, the study identifies a range of spillover effects, including refugee movements, cross-border arms trafficking, and the rise of transnational armed actors. The findings indicate that the conflict in Sudan undermines regional security architectures, overloads the capacities of neighboring states, disrupts trade networks and development initiatives, and challenges the credibility of institutions such as the African Union and IGAD in mediating and enforcing peace settlements. The article contends that, in the absence of coherent and coordinated regional strategies, the Sudanese civil war may entrench pockets of chronic instability that spread to other parts of the continent. Consequently, reinforcing preventive diplomacy, inclusive peace processes, and comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction is essential for preserving Africa's long-term regional stability.

INTRODUCTION

The civil war in Sudan cannot be viewed merely as a domestic conflict between two armed groups, but rather as a regional crisis with far-reaching effects on stability in Africa (UNHCR, 2025). Since the conflict erupted in April 2023, Sudan has experienced one of the world's largest displacement crises, with millions of people forced to flee their home regions and cross into neighboring countries such as Egypt, Chad, South Sudan, Libya, and Uganda (UNHCR, 2025; WHO, 2025). UN reports indicate that the impact of this conflict extends beyond Sudan's territorial borders, as host countries also face domestic capacity constraints, humanitarian burdens, and internal security challenges (United Nations, 2025). Consequently, the war in Sudan is placing additional strain on the region's already vulnerable social, economic, and political structures (Policy Center for the New South, 2024).

From a regional security perspective, the war in Sudan creates growing uncertainty along border regions. Cross-border arms trafficking, the mobilization of armed groups, and the potential involvement of external actors expand the scope of the conflict and heighten the risk of destabilization in neighboring countries (Lowy Institute, 2026). Several reports indicate that the rise in violence along the Chad-South Sudan border is linked to the movement of weapons and the presence of armed groups exploiting weak security oversight (UN, 2025; Aman Africa, 2025). This demonstrates that the Sudanese conflict functions as a spillover conflict—an internal conflict spreading to the regional area through refugee flows, illicit trade, and cross-border armed activities (Lowy Institute, 2026; Policy Center for the New South, 2024).

From a socio-economic perspective, the civil war in Sudan exacerbates the vulnerability of neighboring countries that have long depended on cross-border trade, population mobility, and international aid. The influx of large numbers of refugees leads to increased demand for basic needs—such as food, clean water, healthcare services, and education—while the capacity of host countries remains limited (UNHCR, 2025). UNHCR and WHO note

that this pressure gives rise to various new risks, ranging from weakened food security and disrupted health services to the threat of infectious disease outbreaks in densely populated host communities (WHO, 2025). In the long term, these conditions could hinder human development while widening regional disparities across Africa (UNHCR, 2025). Similar impacts are evident in the regional economic landscape. Disruptions to supply chains, cross-border market activities, and inter-country trade connectivity have weakened the regional economy (Policy Center for the New South, 2024). This instability is also suppressing investment flows and narrowing the fiscal space of neighboring countries, as portions of their budgets must be redirected to meet urgent humanitarian and security needs (ReliefWeb, 2025). Consequently, the war in Sudan not only incurs direct costs in the form of infrastructure damage and loss of life but also indirect costs in the form of a regional economic slowdown that could potentially last longer than the conflict itself (CFR, 2023). In this context, Africa's stability hinges on the region's ability to restore economic connectivity disrupted by the conflict (Policy Center for the New South, 2024). At the institutional level, the conflict in Sudan poses a significant test of the effectiveness of the African Union and IGAD in carrying out their mediation and conflict prevention functions. Various statements and diplomatic initiatives issued by these two institutions reflect a normative commitment to promoting an end to violence and building an inclusive peace process (African Union, 2025; IGAD, 2025). However, the persistence of the conflict indicates that regional mechanisms still face challenges regarding compliance by the parties, coordination with external actors, and the ability to effectively enforce agreements (Aman Africa, 2025). Thus, the African Union and IGAD remain relevant as drivers of regional diplomacy, but their effectiveness depends heavily on the unity of member states' positions, resource support, and consistent political pressure on the warring parties (African Union, 2025).

When analyzed through the lens of realism, this situation can be understood as a response by African states driven primarily by their respective national security interests (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). When central authority weakens, neighboring states tend to take defensive measures to prevent the spread of threats, whether through border fortification, increased patrols, or adjustments to diplomatic orientation (Donnelly, 2000). However, such strategies are generally short-term and have not yet been able to comprehensively resolve the root causes of the problem (Aman Africa, 2025). As long as the internal conflict in Sudan remains unresolved, the African region will remain in a fragile state, as any new escalation has the potential to trigger a domino effect across other nations in East and Central Africa (UN, 2025). Thus, it can be concluded that the civil war in Sudan is not merely a national issue but also a structural factor threatening broader African stability. This conflict generates interrelated impacts across security, humanitarian, economic, and institutional dimensions. Therefore, its resolution requires more than just a cessation of hostilities; it necessitates preventive diplomacy, protection of refugees, strengthened regional cooperation, and post-conflict reconstruction focused on restoring long-term stability (UN, 2025; IGAD, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method to examine the impact of the Sudanese civil war on African stability across regional security, socio-economic, and institutional dimensions. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of complex, context-dependent phenomena such as civil war spillover effects, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone (Creswell, 2012: 45). The research was conducted through documentary analysis, relying exclusively on publicly available written sources rather than primary data collection through surveys, interviews, or field observations. This decision was made due to the ongoing nature of the conflict and the inherent difficulties of accessing conflict zones in Sudan and its neighboring countries.

The data collection procedure followed a systematic documentary retrieval process. First, relevant documents were identified through keyword searches using academic databases as well as the official websites of the African Union, IGAD, and the United Nations. Second, retrieved documents were screened for relevance based on their publication date and documents that merely mentioned Sudan in passing without substantive analysis of regional stability implications were excluded. Third, the selected documents were organized chronologically and thematically to facilitate systematic analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). The analytical process proceeded through five phases. Phase

one involved repeated reading of all collected documents to achieve familiarization with the material. Phase two consisted of generating initial codes by identifying specific passages that addressed the three dimensions of regional stability: security spillovers, socio-economic impacts, and institutional responses. Phase three involved searching for themes by grouping related codes into broader analytical categories. Phase four required reviewing and refining these themes to ensure internal coherence and external distinctiveness. Phase five produced the final thematic structure presented in the findings section, organized around the realist theoretical framework.

The theoretical framework applied in this research was political realism, specifically the classical realism of Morgenthau (1948) and the structural realism of Waltz (1979), as further elaborated by Donnelly (2000). Realism was selected because it provides a parsimonious explanation for state behavior in anarchic international systems, emphasizing national interest, security maximization, and the subordination of international law and institutions to great power politics (Mearsheimer, 2001). In the context of the Sudanese civil war, realism helps explain why neighboring states prioritize border fortification and defensive measures over coordinated regional responses, why external actors engage selectively based on their strategic interests, and why regional institutions such as the African Union and IGAD face persistent challenges in enforcing compliance with peace agreements. The realist framework also illuminates the security dilemma dynamic whereby actions taken by one state to increase its security—such as deploying troops to border areas—inevitably decrease the security of neighboring states, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and competitive armament (Herz, 1950: 158).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Refugee Crisis

The refugee crisis has become one of the most serious consequences of the Sudan conflict because the ongoing war has not only destroyed the country's political and security stability, but has also forced millions of civilians to flee their homes in order to survive armed violence (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). The conflict between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has resulted in increasing civilian casualties, infrastructure destruction, food shortages, and the collapse of public services in various regions of Sudan (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). These conditions have placed civilians in an extremely vulnerable situation, making mass displacement the primary option for survival.

According to a report by the Council on Foreign Relations (2024), millions of Sudanese citizens have been displaced both internally and to neighboring countries such as Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Egypt due to the escalating armed conflict. The massive flow of refugees demonstrates that the Sudan conflict has evolved into a regional humanitarian crisis because its impacts are no longer limited to Sudan's domestic territory alone (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). The refugee crisis illustrates how the Sudan war has not only destroyed the country's internal stability, but has also created social, economic, and security pressures on neighboring states.

The Sudan refugee crisis has been further exacerbated by the lack of international attention toward the conflict. An article published by Kompas.id explained that the Sudan conflict is often considered a "crisis ignored by the world" due to the limited international media coverage and the slow global response to the suffering of Sudanese civilians (Kompas.id, 2024). This situation has caused humanitarian aid, refugee protection, and international support for conflict victims to remain inadequate. As a result, millions of Sudanese refugees are facing poor living conditions such as food shortages, limited healthcare access, inadequate clean water supplies, and threats of violence within refugee camps (Kompas.id, 2024).

The Sudan refugee crisis has also had major impacts on the security stability of border regions, particularly in Chad. According to the journal "The Refugee Crisis in Sudan and Its Impact on the Security Stability of Chad's Border Region," the continuous increase in Sudanese refugees has placed significant pressure on Chad in economic, social, and security sectors (Konsensus, 2025). Chad has experienced difficulties in providing basic necessities for refugees due to limited resources and weak state capacity in handling large-scale refugee influxes (Konsensus, 2025). Furthermore, the growing number of refugees has the potential to trigger social conflict between local communities and refugees due to competition over resources such as food, water, and employment opportunities.

The refugee crisis in Sudan has not only affected the social and economic sectors, but has also influenced regional border security stability. The journal explained that the movement of refugees on a massive scale has increased the risks of arms smuggling, infiltration by armed groups, and cross-border criminal activities in Chad and surrounding areas (Konsensus, 2025). This situation demonstrates that the Sudan refugee crisis cannot merely be viewed as a humanitarian issue, but also as a regional security threat that could expand instability across Central and East Africa.

The refugee crisis resulting from the Sudan war is closely connected to the weakening effectiveness of African regional organizations in handling the Sudan conflict. As previously discussed, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development have faced various limitations in conflict mediation, peace implementation, and enforcement mechanisms against the conflicting parties (American University School of International Service, 2023). The weakening effectiveness of these regional organizations has allowed the Sudan conflict to continue without effective resolution, thereby worsening both the humanitarian and refugee crises.

The inability of African regional organizations to create stable peace has caused civilians to become the most affected victims of the prolonged conflict. When mediation efforts fail to stop violence and ceasefire violations continue to occur, civilians lose their sense of security and are no longer able to remain in conflict areas, making mass displacement unavoidable (American University School of International Service, 2023). Therefore, the Sudan refugee crisis demonstrates that the weakening effectiveness of African regional organizations has not only contributed to the failure of conflict resolution, but has also intensified the humanitarian crisis and regional instability across Africa.

Escalation of Transnational Ethnic Conflicts

The Sudanese civil war that broke out on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) has evolved from a power struggle into a devastating transnational ethnic conflict, particularly in Darfur, where the RSF—as the successor to the Arab Janjaweed militias—launched a campaign of ethnic cleansing against non-Arab tribes such as the Fur, Zaghawa, Masalit, and Nuba, resulting in an estimated 150,000–400,000 deaths overall and 30,000–60,000 in El Fasher alone in October–November 2025 (World on Fire, 2026; United Nations News, 2025; Kohnert, 2023). This escalation, marked by dehumanizing hate speech such as referring to non-Arabs as “filth” or “forest animals,” has created 12 million internally displaced persons and 4 million external refugees—the world’s largest displacement crisis—triggering cross-border fear diffusion into Chad, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, threatening Africa’s overall stability through conflict spillover and undermining the AU/IGAD security architecture (Policy Center for the New South, 2024; Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; Lowry Institute, 2026). As a fourth-semester International Relations student at the National University, this analysis explores the dynamics of transnational ethnic escalation in the Sudanese war as a catalyst for continental instability, with up-to-date data through 2026 indicating Sudan’s functional partition into RSF ethnic zones in the west and SAF zones in the east (Badi, 2025; World on Fire, 2026).

The conflict, which began as a rivalry among military elites in Khartoum, rapidly metamorphosed into an ethnic war in Darfur, where the RSF seized Nyala, Zalingei, and finally El Fasher in October 2025 after an 18-month siege, carrying out mass killings documented by the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab through satellite analysis as a systematic campaign involving the burning of bodies and the razing of villages (World on Fire, 2026; The Guardian, 2025). Its transnational nature is manifested in the ethnic ties of the Zaghawa—the main supporters of the SAF in North Darfur—with kin in eastern Chad, which has fueled cross-border flows of fighters and the recruitment of armed militias since 2023, while the Masalit tribe in Geneina suffered an RSF attack in June 2023 that killed 15,000 people and forced 600,000 refugees into Chad (United Nations News, 2025; Wikipedia, 2024). In Al Jazirah, a December 2023 SAF attack on the Kanabi camp—housing 500,000 Nuba, Fur, and Masalit refugees—led to the mass evacuation of 500,000 people, with accusations of ethnic cleansing from both sides accompanied by systematic rape and aid blockades (European Parliament Research Service, 2025; OHCHR, 2025). This dehumanizing rhetoric, such as the RSF’s statement “if you’re black, you’re finished” (The Guardian, 2025), accelerates the spiral of violence through social media and radio, creating an environment where non-Arab civilians are viewed as legitimate enemies.

The triggers for escalation are multifaceted: first, the disintegration of the chain of command following the collapse of the transitional government, which allowed ethnic militias to operate autonomously; second, external support such as the UAE's backing of the RSF (weapons and training in Ethiopia) and Russia's support for the SAF (Wagner for gold); third, the failure of the Jeddah/IGAD negotiations due to Egypt-Ethiopia regional rivalry (Badi, 2025; Kohnert, 2023; Le Monde, 2026). Fear diffusion operates through the diaspora: Zaghawa refugees in Chad mobilize support for the SAF, while nomadic Arabs in Libya join the RSF; meanwhile, in Ethiopia, 1 million Sudanese refugees from Gezira fuel tensions with Tigray and Amhara militias still traumatized by the 2020–2022 civil war (Lowry Institute, 2026; Consensus Journal, 2025). In South Sudan, the aid blockade via Sudan exacerbates Phase 5 IPC famine for 25 million people, with armed refugees forming anti-SPLM militias (CIMIC COE, 2025).

The escalation mechanism follows a contagion-diffusion-intervention model: contagion through porous borders such as Adre (Sudan-Chad), where 400,000 refugees triggered ethnic clashes in 2025; diffusion via rumors and viral videos of RSF atrocities that provoked a SAF response in Kordofan; intervention by actors such as Wagner (15,000 mercenaries in 2024) and UAE training camps in Ethiopia (Le Monde, 2026; Policy Center for the New South, 2024). The climax in El Fasher: the RSF siege resulted in 30,000–60,000 deaths, with Yale satellites detecting 1,500 burned structures and mass graves, forcing 120,000 refugees into Chad, which closed its border in February 2026 (World on Fire, 2026). In South Kordofan, the 2026 El Obeid frontline saw daily SAF drone strikes, while the RSF controlled 70% of West Darfur. Implications for African stability include the de facto partition of Sudan (RSF in Darfur, SAF in the Nile Valley), a refugee crisis straining Chad (1.2 million refugees), Ethiopia (1 million), and South Sudan (800,000), the potential for jihadist infiltration among refugees, and the UAE-Russia-Egypt that erodes AU capacity (Lowry Institute, 2026; Kohnert, 2023). Economic impact: 30 million in need of aid, 80% of universities closed, 20 million children out of school (World on Fire, 2026). Mitigation: AU enforcement of R2P, ethnic power-sharing in the Jeddah talks, IGAD border patrols, and targeted sanctions (Policy Center for the New South, 2024; European Parliament Research Service, 2025).

Security Instability in the Red Sea Lane

The geopolitical consequences of the Sudanese civil war extend directly to the security of the Red Sea, one of the world's most vital maritime chokepoints. Approximately 12% of global trade and nearly 10% of seaborne oil pass through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Suez Canal, making any disruption along Sudan's 750-kilometer coastline a matter of international concern (Lowry Institute, 2026: 3; Salim, 2025: 132). The war has created a security vacuum along Sudan's eastern seaboard, with the SAF preoccupied on western fronts and the RSF unable to consolidate control over the coastline. This vacuum has emboldened external actors to accelerate their naval positioning efforts, but it has also enabled non-state armed groups and illicit networks to exploit the ungoverned spaces.

In realist terms, the security dilemma is clearly at work: actions taken by one state to enhance its security—such as Russia seeking a naval base—are perceived by others (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United States) as direct threats to their own strategic interests (Herz, 1950: 158). Egypt, which possesses the longest Red Sea coastline and depends on Suez Canal revenues, has explicitly rejected any non-littoral military presence, declaring that Red Sea security must be the exclusive responsibility of bordering states (Salim, 2025: 146). This positional rigidity stems from Cairo's fear that a Russian or Iranian foothold in Port Sudan could encircle Egypt, undermine its influence in the Horn of Africa, and complicate Nile diplomacy with Ethiopia (Lowry Institute, 2026: 6). Saudi Arabia, while formally neutral in the SAF-RSF conflict, shares Egypt's aversion to Iranian or Russian encroachment and has used its financial leverage over Sudan to discourage such deals.

The instability has also produced tangible security incidents. Eritrea, a close SAF ally, deployed naval units to Port Sudan in July 2024 as a demonstration of support, yet this move simultaneously raised tensions with Djibouti and Somalia, highlighting how bilateral alignments in the Sudan war can trigger secondary security dilemmas across the Red Sea basin (Salim, 2025: 139). Furthermore, reports indicate that arms destined for the RSF have transited through informal ports along the Sudanese coast, circumventing UN sanctions and feeding into broader regional arms trafficking networks that also affect Yemen and Somalia (Policy Center for the New South, 2024: 9-10). The disruption of normal port operations at Suakin and Port Sudan has forced rerouting of some shipping traffic, increasing transit times and insurance costs, albeit not yet reaching the crisis levels of the

Bab el-Mandeb. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect is a gradual erosion of the cooperative security frameworks that had been developed through the Red Sea Forum and the Council of the Arab and African States bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

From a realist perspective, the Red Sea's current trajectory is toward a more militarized and competitive order. In the absence of a hegemon capable of enforcing collective security—comparable to the United States in the post-Cold War Gulf—the region is reverting to a multipolar balance-of-power logic where each state prioritizes its own naval assets and bilateral bargains over multilateral trust-building (Waltz, 1979: 126). The Sudanese civil war, by destabilizing the largest littoral state, has removed a potential anchor for regional cooperation and replaced it with a source of systemic uncertainty. Unless a coordinated external mediation succeeds in restoring a stable government in Khartoum that can exert sovereign control over its coastline, the Red Sea is likely to remain a zone of latent great-power rivalry, with periodic spikes in low-intensity confrontation.

Competition for Influence among External Powers

The protracted conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has transformed Sudan into an arena for competing external interventions, a pattern consistent with realist expectations of great power behavior in weak states (Donnelly, 2000: 34). Rather than pursuing coordinated conflict resolution, external actors have exploited the power vacuum to advance their own geopolitical and economic agendas. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has reportedly supplied the RSF with drones, logistics, and financial support, motivated by the desire to secure access to Sudan's gold reserves and agricultural land, as well as to counter Islamist influence in the Horn of Africa (Lowy Institute, 2026: 4). Conversely, Egypt and Saudi Arabia have provided overt political and covert military backing to the SAF, viewing a unified Sudanese state under army control as essential to their national security, particularly regarding Nile water governance and regional counterterrorism cooperation (Salim, 2025: 138; Lowy Institute, 2026: 5).

Russia has pursued a dual strategy, maintaining channels to both belligerents while prioritizing an agreement with the SAF-led government to establish a naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast at Port Sudan. This quest, codified in a 2020 draft agreement and reaffirmed in 2025 negotiations, reflects Moscow's broader ambition to project power into the Indian Ocean and secure a warm-water port capable of hosting nuclear-powered vessels (Salim, 2025: 140-141). From a realist perspective, Russia's engagement is not driven by ideological affinity but by the material imperative of expanding its strategic footprint in a globally significant chokepoint (Mearsheimer, 2001: 142). Similarly, Iran has sought to re-establish a naval presence in Sudan after restoring diplomatic relations in 2023, offering military drones and intelligence support to the SAF in exchange for access to the Red Sea coastline (Salim, 2025: 143). However, Sudan's leadership has so far refused Iranian requests, citing potential backlash from the United States and Saudi Arabia, illustrating how even a war-torn state can leverage competing external offers to preserve some degree of autonomy (Waltz, 1979: 96).

Turkey and Qatar, while less overtly militarized, have pursued influence through economic and reconstruction deals, including the 99-year lease for the Ottoman era port of Suakin (Salim, 2025: 144). These agreements, though largely unimplemented due to Sudan's political turmoil, signal long-term positioning strategies rather than immediate humanitarian concern. The realist framework thus clarifies that external interventions in Sudan are primarily self-interested responses to anarchy and relative gains, not altruistic peace-building efforts. The multiplicity of external patrons has fragmented the conflict, prolonged the fighting, and reduced the leverage of regional institutions like the African Union and IGAD, which lack the coercive power to enforce compliance (Morgenthau, 1948: 145). Consequently, the civil war in Sudan has evolved into a proxy theatre where great and middle powers compete for strategic assets, deepening the very instability they claim to address.

The Declining Effectiveness of Regional Organizations

The Sudan conflict is one of the most complex conflicts in the African region because it involves interconnected political, ethnic, economic, security, and humanitarian issues (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). The conflict is not only driven by struggles for political power among government elites, but is also influenced by development inequality, weak state institutions, competition over natural resources, and long-standing ethnic polarization (Gai

& Wanyama, 2025). The Sudan conflict has evolved into a regional security threat because its impacts are not only felt domestically, but also affect the overall stability of the East African region (Gai & Wanyama, 2025).

After South Sudan gained independence in 2011, hopes emerged that the new state would be capable of building a stable and democratic system of government (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). However, these conditions did not last long because the political rivalry between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar developed into an armed conflict in 2013 (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). What initially began as political competition among elites later transformed into an ethnic conflict between the Dinka and Nuer groups because the two main leaders came from different ethnic backgrounds (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). The transformation of political conflict into ethnic conflict made the escalation of violence increasingly difficult to control as civilians became polarized based on their respective group identities (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). As a result, the Sudan conflict evolved into a prolonged civil war that created political and security instability across the East African region (Gai & Wanyama, 2025).

The Sudan conflict also developed into a humanitarian crisis that had widespread impacts on civilians (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). Various human rights violations such as mass killings, sexual violence, village destruction, and the recruitment of child soldiers occurred throughout the conflict (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). In addition, millions of civilians were forced to flee to neighboring countries such as Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Chad due to escalating armed violence (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). The flow of refugees and the increasing activities of cross-border armed groups caused the Sudan conflict to become a threat to regional security stability in Africa (Gai & Wanyama, 2025).

In this situation, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development faced major challenges in carrying out their regional security and conflict mediation functions (American University School of International Service, 2023). African regional organizations experienced difficulties in creating effective coordination because the Sudan conflict involved numerous armed actors, the political interests of regional states, and extensive humanitarian issues (American University School of International Service, 2023). As a result, conflict resolution could not rely solely on formal political negotiations, but also required deeper structural reforms, including social reconciliation, security sector reform, and the strengthening of state institutions (American University School of International Service, 2023).

As the primary regional organization in East Africa, IGAD played an important role in mediating the South Sudan conflict through various peace negotiation forums (American University School of International Service, 2023). One of the main outcomes of this mediation process was the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan in 2015, which aimed to end the civil war, establish a transitional government, and create a power-sharing arrangement between Salva Kiir and Riek Machar (American University School of International Service, 2023). However, the implementation of the agreement instead demonstrated the weakening effectiveness of African regional organizations in creating stable and sustainable peace (American University School of International Service, 2023).

Although the peace agreement was successfully signed, conflict erupted again in 2016 when government and opposition forces clashed in the capital city of Juba (American University School of International Service, 2023). This situation showed that the peace agreement mediated by regional organizations had not been able to comprehensively resolve the root causes of the conflict (American University School of International Service, 2023). The peace agreement focused more on political power-sharing among elites rather than structural reforms such as ethnic reconciliation, security sector reform, and institutional strengthening (American University School of International Service, 2023). Consequently, the peace that was created remained fragile and easily collapsed whenever new political rivalries emerged (American University School of International Service, 2023).

The weakening effectiveness of African regional organizations was also influenced by weak neutrality and inconsistency in the mediation process of the Sudan conflict (American University School of International Service, 2023). In the South Sudan conflict, several IGAD member states had different political and security interests toward the conflicting parties (American University School of International Service, 2023). Uganda was known to have provided military support to Salva Kiir's government during the early stages of the conflict, creating the perception that the regional mediation process was more supportive of the government than the

opposition groups (American University School of International Service, 2023). On the other hand, Sudan also had strategic interests in South Sudan, particularly regarding border security and economic access to oil resources (American University School of International Service, 2023).

In addition to neutrality issues, African regional organizations also faced problems of policy inconsistency due to differing interests among member states (American University School of International Service, 2023). From the perspective of realism in International Relations, states continue to act based on national interest rather than the collective interests of regional organizations. This situation caused regional organizational policies to frequently shift according to the political dynamics of member states rather than the objective needs of conflict resolution (American University School of International Service, 2023). The weak consistency of regional organizations was also evident in their inability to impose sustained political pressure on parties that violated peace agreements (American University School of International Service, 2023). Another factor that weakened the effectiveness of African regional organizations was the limited capacity for intervention and enforcement against conflicting parties (American University School of International Service, 2023). Although IGAD succeeded in bringing conflicting parties together in negotiation forums, regional organizations lacked sufficient capacity to enforce the implementation of peace agreements (American University School of International Service, 2023). When conflict re-emerged in 2016, the response of regional organizations mainly consisted of diplomatic pressure and political appeals without effective security measures (American University School of International Service, 2023). This condition demonstrated that African regional organizations still lacked strong enforcement mechanisms to punish ceasefire violations or compel conflicting parties to comply with peace agreements (American University School of International Service, 2023).

The limitations of intervention capacity were also influenced by the strong principle of non-interference in Africa (American University School of International Service, 2023). Many member states continued to view direct intervention in domestic conflicts as a threat to national sovereignty (American University School of International Service, 2023). As a result, regional organizations tended to act cautiously and prioritize diplomatic negotiations over coercive measures (American University School of International Service, 2023). This situation caused responses to conflicts to proceed slowly and fail to stop violence effectively (American University School of International Service, 2023).

The limited effectiveness of African regional organizations was also evident in the implementation of the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (Alunaza SD & Toy, 2018). The peacekeeping operation faced major obstacles, particularly the lack of full support from the Sudanese government toward peacekeeping activities (Alunaza SD & Toy, 2018). The Sudanese government frequently viewed UNAMID as an international force threatening the stability of the Sudanese regime (Alunaza SD & Toy, 2018). Furthermore, peacekeeping troops also faced serious security threats from armed groups in the Darfur region (Alunaza SD & Toy, 2018). The vast conflict area, poor infrastructure, and logistical limitations made it difficult for peacekeeping operations to establish effective security control (Alunaza SD & Toy, 2018).

Overall, the Sudan conflict demonstrates that African regional organizations continue to face various structural limitations in handling internal conflicts within member states (Gai & Wanyama, 2025). The complexity of the conflict, weak peace implementation, differing interests among member states, limited enforcement mechanisms, and obstacles to peacekeeping operations became the main factors that significantly weakened the effectiveness of African regional organizations in responding to the Sudan war (Gai & Wanyama, 2025).

The Threat of Terrorism and Arms Smuggling

The 2023–2026 Sudanese War has triggered an explosion of arms smuggling and transnational terrorism threats that are shaking the foundations of stability in Africa, with the looting of over 300 military armories in Khartoum and Darfur flooding the black markets of Chad, Libya, the Sahel, and Ethiopia, supplying the RSF, SAF, mercenaries, and jihadists such as IS -Sahel and Al-Shabaab with small arms and light weapons (SALW), drones, and ammunition worth billions of dollars (Badi, 2025; Amnesty International, 2024; Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025). The main UAE-Libya-Chad route for the RSF (600 Abu Dhabi-Koufra flights in 2025) and the Russia -Iran for the SAF creates an arms-crime-terrorism nexus, where RSF gold (40% of Africa's production) is converted into weapons, funding the Wagner mercenaries (15,000 fighters) and

proliferation to the Sahel, which increases IS attacks by 40% (Le Monde, 2026; Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; Vision of Humanity, 2025). This analysis explores how this phenomenon, stemming from the war in Sudan, has become a driver of instability in Africa (Kohnert, 2023; Real Tribune, 2025). Arms smuggling surged following the looting of Khartoum (April 2023), with over 100,000 weapons flowing into Chad via Adre, Libya via Koufra (RSF corridor), and Ethiopia via UAE-run training camps; Invicta Air Cargo (UAE-owned in the CAR) has facilitated the Bangui-Birao route for the RSF since 2025 (Le Monde, 2026; Badi, 2025). Terrorism threats emerge from collaboration: Sudanese weapons found with Islamic States in Mali (2024), RSF recruits Wagner for Darfur atrocities, while Iranian SAF drones leak to Al-Shabaab in Somalia; in Chad, Sudanese arms fuel a Boko Haram hybrid with local militias (Amnesty International, 2024; World on Fire, 2026).

Triggering factors: UN embargoes violated (UAE 600 flights, Russian gold swaps), border collapse (Chad closes Adre in 2026), and RSF's \$2 billion/year in gold profits for Turkish/Chinese weapons; Sahel drug trafficking linked to jihadists (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2025; Kohnert, 2023). In the Sahel, Sudanese weapons increase IS attacks by 30–40%, while Ethiopia faces proliferation to the Oromo Liberation Army via Port Sudan routes (Vision of Humanity, 2025; Lowry Institute, 2026).

Mechanism: UAE-Cyrenaica (Haftar ally) supply chain to the RSF via Ilyushin cargo; Facebook/Telegram markets sell looted arms; Sahel mercenaries (Wagner, Chadian rebels) escort convoys to support narcoterrorism; RSF gold via Port Sudan used to purchase Chinese drones for the SAF, which leaked into Tigray (Le Monde, 2026; Real Tribune, 2025). In CAR, the UAE's economic offensive (mines) serves as a gateway for arms to the RSF in Birao (Le Monde, 2026).

Case: RSF Libya routes arms to Niger/Mali jihadists; SAF Iran drones to Somalia; Chad 2025 clashes over Boko Haram arms from Sudan; South Sudan SPLM-IO weapons from Gezira looting (Badi, 2025; Council on Foreign Relations, 2026). 2026: SAF symbolically retakes Khartoum, but the continued flow of arms fuels the Sahel insurgency.

Implications: Sahel destabilization (IS expansion), Horn of Africa proxy wars (UAE-Russia-Ethiopia), armed refugee militias, AU overwhelmed with 30 million in need of aid (Lowry Institute, 2026; Policy Center for the New South, 2024). Mitigation: ATT enforcement, IGAD patrols, UN weapons tracing, sanctions against the UAE and Russia (Amnesty International, 2024; European Parliament Research Service, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The Sudanese civil war has evolved into one of the most destabilizing conflicts in Africa because its impacts extend beyond Sudan's domestic political crisis and increasingly threaten regional security, humanitarian stability, and geopolitical order across the continent. The conflict demonstrates how internal wars in fragile states can develop into transnational crises involving arms trafficking, terrorism, proxy warfare, refugee displacement, and regional instability. Rather than remaining confined within Sudan's borders, the war has created interconnected security challenges affecting the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Central Africa, and neighboring border regions.

One of the most significant consequences of the conflict is the rapid spread of illicit arms networks across Africa. The collapse of security control in Sudan enabled large quantities of weapons to circulate through neighboring countries such as Chad, Libya, Ethiopia, Niger, and Mali. These weapons strengthened insurgent groups, rebel militias, and extremist organizations operating throughout the region. As a result, the Sudan conflict became a catalyst for wider regional insecurity rather than merely a domestic political confrontation. The increasing availability of weapons also intensified violence in already fragile regions, contributing to the expansion of terrorism and organized armed activity across Africa.

The conflict further intensified the relationship between organized crime, illicit economies, and terrorism. Sudan's natural resources, particularly gold, became an important financial source for armed groups to sustain military operations, purchase weapons, and strengthen alliances with mercenary networks. This war economy prolonged the conflict and created broader instability across multiple regions simultaneously. In addition, the involvement of external actors transformed Sudan into an arena of geopolitical competition, where foreign

powers pursued strategic interests through political, military, and economic support for competing factions. Instead of encouraging peacebuilding efforts, these interventions often prolonged violence and deepened instability within Sudan and surrounding regions.

The Sudan conflict has also generated severe humanitarian consequences, particularly through the massive displacement of civilians. Millions of people were forced to flee their homes due to violence, insecurity, food shortages, and the collapse of public services. Neighboring countries such as Chad, Ethiopia, and South Sudan experienced major social and economic pressures caused by the large influx of refugees. The refugee crisis not only created humanitarian challenges, but also increased security risks in border areas due to the potential spread of arms trafficking, militant infiltration, and cross-border criminal activity. Consequently, the humanitarian crisis became closely interconnected with regional security instability.

Furthermore, the conflict exposed the limited effectiveness of regional organizations in responding to complex African crises. Regional institutions faced major difficulties in implementing sustainable peace agreements, controlling cross-border insecurity, and preventing external interference. Although diplomatic negotiations and mediation efforts were conducted, recurring violence and continuous ceasefire violations demonstrated the weakness of enforcement mechanisms and regional coordination. The prolonged nature of the conflict illustrated that regional organizations still lack sufficient capacity to effectively manage multidimensional conflicts involving political violence, humanitarian emergencies, and transnational security threats simultaneously.

The war also demonstrated how fragile governance structures and weak border management systems contribute to the expansion of regional instability. The breakdown of state institutions enabled smuggling networks, illicit arms markets, and transnational criminal groups to operate more freely across African border regions. This situation created interconnected patterns of violence in which terrorism, organized crime, and armed conflict reinforced one another. As instability spread across neighboring countries, the Sudan conflict increasingly became a continental security concern rather than a purely national issue.

Overall, the Sudanese civil war illustrates that unresolved domestic conflicts in fragile states can rapidly evolve into broader regional crises when combined with external intervention, illicit arms proliferation, weak governance, and transnational militant activity. The conflict has become a major driver of instability in Africa by intensifying terrorism, worsening humanitarian emergencies, expanding refugee displacement, and increasing geopolitical rivalry across the continent. Therefore, resolving the Sudan conflict requires not only domestic political settlement, but also stronger regional cooperation, effective border security management, stricter control over arms trafficking, and coordinated international efforts to prevent the further spread of violence and instability throughout Africa.

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